

“Winter meditation” for Wednesday, February 17, 2021 and a “simple Ash Wednesday Service”

Good sunny, brisk morning from a hill in Rockport!

It's Ash Wednesday! And if we were having church services in our sanctuary now, I would be having an Ash Wednesday Service in our sanctuary this evening..... but since we still need to be worshiping via cyberspace because of a dastardly virus, we'll gather remotely for this service.... you in your homes and me in our home..... I know not many of you reading my words ever plan to come to an Ash Wednesday Service, in the flesh, so you can experience this from afar, in the privacy of your home, as you wish, or not.

I love Ash Wednesday, in a strange sort of way, because it is the one day in the Christian calendar when we are truly asked to look within ourselves and say we're sorry for having gone awry in our relations with one another in the past twelve months. It is the day to confess, honestly, “I screwed up. I haven't always been the kind of person I would like to be in the past year.” Jews do this kind of active soul searching and admission better than we do, as Protestant Christians. Catholics tend to do it better, too. I've learned from many Catholics, guilt is big for them.

As Protestants, many of us don't want to admit too often to being guilty of being less than kind, less than considerate, less than loving. So today's the day – I can admit to you, from afar, that I'm not always nice, I'm not always patient, I'm not always loving or lovable. How about you? If you live with someone with whom you can confess your sins, perhaps today, Ash Wednesday, would be a good time to do that. But probably more important than even speaking the confession out loud to another person is speaking it to yourself, speaking it to God, whoever or however you conceive of that Presence in your life, or your desire for that Presence if you don't feel it now....

So here's an Ash Wednesday Service that I've adapted from a service given in the *Seasons of the Spirit* curriculum for Lent and Easter in 2015. I hope you will find it to be meaningful and helpful as we begin the Season of Lent, 2021.

### **Ashes of Truth – Wednesday, February 17, 2021**

#### **Opening sentences**

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The laments in life are gathered here in their frail humanness.  
Our grieving rises in the shadows of life, called into our minds and hearts.

We hear the echoes of the fading cheers for good  
and remember when our hands did not reach out to support the Christ.  
We look ahead and see the Lenten journey before us.  
The lament of life is gathered here.  
Let us stay with it in honesty and courage.

*You may want to light a candle in this moment, or turn down the lights,  
to soften your surroundings at this point.....*

### **An opening prayer**

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O God, in this quiet place of prayer and humility before you,  
the tears of our regrets fall on the ashes of truth.  
We see the shadows and flickering light on the road  
and the hands of longing peoples  
reaching hopefully towards compassion and justice.  
We listen to the grief in the sighing of our planet,  
as it groans and struggles for its life.  
And we hear, in our minds' memories,  
reminders of many missed moments for the announcing of prophetic truth,  
when our courage and commitment failed us.  
We remember those lost this past year to a vicious virus,  
and wonder if there was more we could have done  
to help those in need in this unsettling and challenging time.  
As life reaches out to hold us into good, we often let it pass  
and turn our faces from the costly road on which Christ walked.  
And now, O God, as your church, our hearts weep,  
when we remember the divine dreams and visions  
shining before us in Jesus.  
We remember our claiming of your name as the people of God  
and the many betrayals of the great hope  
to which we are called as your people this day.  
We look at the cross and the light of your life in all the world,  
and our own claimings of faithfulness to you.  
We acknowledge that this longing is often reduced to ashes,  
and becomes a burnt sign of our lost aspirations.  
In sadness we know who we wanted to be and who we really are.  
Hear our prayers this Ash Wednesday, O God,  
that we might find relief in your compassionate wisdom.  
Amen.

## Reading of Scripture

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Find a Bible and read these passages –

Psalm 51:1-17

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

## A Hymn for Ash Wednesday

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In both the *United Methodist Hymnal* and the *Hymnal of the United Church of Christ*  
If you know the tune, sing the words. If not, say them aloud....

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,  
The gracious calling of the Lord, let us like them, without a word,  
Rise up and follow thee.*

*O sabbath rest by Galilee, O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!*

*Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm.*

## Ashes touch our lives....

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Since we are not able to be together for the receiving of ashes on our foreheads,  
signifying the fact that we came from dust and to dust we will return,

I invite you to do the following:

Write on a small piece of paper

things you would like to be forgiven for over this past year.

Once you have done that, I invite you to tear up what you have written,  
and either toss the scraps of paper into your fireplace, wood stove, or trash can.

In this way, can you visualize forgiving yourself and receiving forgiveness,  
not only from others, but from God ,and from yourself....

while saying these words:  
Joined with the ashes of my burnt possibilities,  
can I discover the oil, the balm, of comfort  
available to me always if only I ask....  
Here, with the remains of lost hopes,  
can I find the Holy Spirit of God,  
inviting me again to a true encounter with my past and present  
and joining me with all others as we face what has been  
and move us toward a new day.  
Amen.

**A closing blessing**

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In the gloomy places, the light of truth will be found.  
Go now with courage into that truth.  
And may your life be touched by grace,  
that Jesus never leave you nor forsake you  
and the God who lights all life  
be known in all the earth  
as the One who loves us in all our humble humanness.  
Amen.

**You may choose to blow out the candle you lit at the beginning of this service  
or turn the lights up again and return to your regular programming.....  
Thanks for sharing in this Ash Wednesday Service with me.....**

*Blessings to each one, Susan*